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New farm worker rule not only for Jamaicans

Q. *Why is the United States changing the rule for Jamaican farm workers traveling to the United States this year and requiring them to get a visa? Is Jamaica being singled out for this new treatment?*

A: Not at all. The rule change applies to any nationality previously exempt from the visa requirement. They are citizens of British, French, or Netherlands territory in the Caribbean and Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

In fact, the Department of State changed this rule in order to standardize the H-2A, or “farm worker” process and bring it into line with the rules applied in the rest of the world. Until now, Jamaica had been one of that small list of countries above, whose citizens had a special exception. The rest of the world’s farm workers have always needed a visa to complete seasonal work in the United States.

The visa exemption for agricultural workers from these specified Caribbean countries dated back more than 70 years. It was implemented primarily to address U.S. labor shortages during World War II. Given the many changes since that time, the exemption is outdated and out of line with the visa requirement for H-2A agricultural workers from other countries.

The visa will facilitate the entry of these seasonal workers. It also will reduce fraud, an important consideration for all of us. And it will address security concerns in an age when border security is a critical issue for all nations. In the visa interview, Jamaican workers will be advised of their rights and protections as workers in the United States, thus reducing their vulnerability to possible employment- and recruitment-based abuses.

The Embassy has worked closely with Jamaica’s Ministry of Labor to prepare for this change. We know the Ministry is actively engaged with US employers, all of whom are also aware of the change. The Embassy looks forward to processing visa applications from all H-2A workers this season, and seeing the continued success of this labor program.

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